

Press release

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EFSA fails to address risks of genetically engineered plants properly

Testbiotech report presented by the Greens in European Parliament

Munich/Strasbourg - The expert-group Testbiotech calls for much stricter standards in the risk assessment of genetically engineered plants. A report prepared by Testbiotech on behalf of the Greens in the European Parliament is being presented in Strasbourg today. The report analyses the draft guidelines for the environmental risk assessment of genetically engineered plants that have been drawn up by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and are currently under discussion.

“There is a basic misconception in EFSA's idea which assumes genetically engineered plants are similar to those obtained by conventional breeding. In fact they are fundamentally different,” says Christoph Then, executive director of Testbiotech. “Taking this wrong assumption as a basis, the risk assessment as proposed by EFSA is based largely on deliberations of a general nature and not on empirical data. EFSA's standards may help the industry to save money but they are not sufficient to evaluate risks to the environment and human health.”

Testbiotech proposes comprehensive testing of genetically engineered plants under defined environmental conditions. For example, genetic stability and genome-environment interactivity should be investigated systematically (in so called 'crash-tests'). Furthermore, clear standards for rejecting commercial releases of genetically engineered plants should be formulated so as to safeguard sustainable practices in agriculture and protect biodiversity.

“It is clear from Testbiotech's analysis that the concept of 'substantial equivalence' and comparability of genetically engineered crops and plants from conventional breeding is treated as a dogma by EFSA and the European Commission,” the European Parliament members José Bové and Sandrine Bélier explain. “Within a week Commissioner John Dalli will present his proposal to allow for the national prohibition of the cultivation of genetically engineered crops. On the other hand, however, EFSA's proposal would allow companies to reduce risk assessment to just a few studies and to speed up market authorisation for the EU territory overall. The critical analysis of Testbiotech shows that the concept of the EU Commission and EFSA would work to open the door to fast track procedures and more cultivation of genetically engineered crops.”

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